Reimagining a Realist Evaluation Research in Entrepreneurship Skills Development and the Idea of University Education

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the evaluation research project, which focussed on the viability and sustainability challenges in one particular case of a university over a period of five years. Such a university remains categorised as structurally disadvantaged despite almost thirty years into constitutional democracy in South Africa. As such, the research project was conducted against the complexity of the university transformation project, which take place against the enduring social ills as high unemployment rate, increasing inequalities and abject poverties especially from the enduring legacy of the old racist apartheid system. The role of university education in such a context becomes the reflexive imperative in consideration of university, not only as the public good and equity, but for social justice and equity discourses. Such discourses need to be made more loud than is presently the case. The research therefore focussed on the role of entrepreneurship skills development, which then were juxtaposed with the espoused values of science, innovation and technology as the key performance indicators for the academic project. As such, the article will revolve around the main argument that scholarship of engagement in university spaces, where entrepreneurship skills development ought to be the enabling system, need to be reimagined in terms of the contemporary research disciplines. Critical realist philosophy, and the realist social theory as the explanatory program, provide the alternative research approach to the mainstream approaches due to their explanatory power for for transcendentalism and based on retroductive arguemnts about the social world. Such an approach does not only foreground the contemporary debates in social sciences, and the emerging fields of study within it, but also help to elaborate on the purist positions that tend to be promoted in some business science fields and their inadvertent pragmatic and black box logic.

Keywords: Viability, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship skills development, Historically disadvantaged universities, realist evaluative research